



Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as The Alexandria Times and Advertiser

Out of the Attic

The day the hurricane came to Alexandria

Alexandria Times, September 12, 2019

While Alexandria was spared the effects of Hurricane Dorian, our town has not always been so fortunate. In fact, Alexandria has a long history of vicious storms.

A hailstorm on June 2, 1879 shattered almost every windowpane in the city that faced west. But the worst for a long time was the Sept. 29, 1896 cyclone, now known as the Cedar Keys Hurricane. In total, the giant storm destroyed approximately \$9.6 million in property, which today would equal approximately \$289 million. The storm killed more than 202 people along the East Coast.

Rather than covering the broad destruction of the storm, the Sept. 30 Alexandria Gazette focused on the storm's destruction in Alexandria. It read, in part:

"Death ... was following in the wake of the disturbance, and in two instances at least, bricks and debris had crushed out human life. Mr. Stewart was killed outright while sitting in a back room of his home on the north side of the 500 block of Cameron Street."

The collapse of a wall from his neighbor's house collided with his chimney, and its subsequent collapse rained bricks and mortar on Mr. Stewart, killing him instantly.

Other buildings also suffered damage. Third Baptist Church on the northeast corner of Patrick and Princess Streets suffered extreme damage to all parts of its building, except for its bell tower. Schuler's Hall on the south side of King Street between Patrick and Henry had its southern wall blown in, and falling bricks turned its wooden stage into little more than kindling.

The resident of 124 S. Fairfax Street, John Heisley, barely saved his three children from a chimney that collapsed on the bed that they had been sleeping in. In total, approximately 200 buildings suffered damage in Alexandria, at approximately \$100,000 worth of damage in 1896 currency.

The accounts of the 1896 Cedar Keys Hurricane are a harsh reminder that though rare, hurricanes can reach Alexandria. The loss of life and property that night 123 years ago serves as a stark warning that hurricanes are never a joking matter.

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.